

# **Not Far From The Kingdom**

**By Mark Mayberry  
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## **Introduction**

The kingdom of God was a focal point of prophecy. Jacob said that the scepter would not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until the coming of Him to whom authority belongs (Gen. 49:8-10). Isaiah said that the Messiah, the Prince of Peace, would reign on David's throne, thus establishing a just and righteous government (Isa. 9:6-7). Daniel said that in the days of the Roman empire, God would establish a kingdom that would never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44-45).

As the time drew nigh for God's purpose to be fulfilled, both John the Baptist (Matt. 3:1-2) and Jesus Christ (Matt. 4:17) preached that "the kingdom of God is at hand." In other words, its establishment was imminent. After centuries of preparation and anticipation, the Messianic kingdom would soon be inaugurated (Matt. 16:28; Mark 9:1).

Not only was the kingdom of God near unto men, but the Bible also speaks of men who were near unto the kingdom. During his last visit to Jerusalem, Jesus paid a very high compliment to one of the scribes who had questioned Him. He said to the scribe, "You are not far from the kingdom of God" (Mark 12:28-34).

While the scribe had been appraising Jesus, Jesus had been appraising the scribe. His discreet answer led Jesus to say that he was not far from God's kingdom. Clearly, the distance to which Jesus referred was not physical but spiritual. As we shall see, this individual had a grasp of spiritual truths, which, if pursued, would lead him into the kingdom of God.

## **The Nature of the Kingdom**

The New Testament uses various phrases to describe the people of God. These include the church of Christ, the kingdom of God, the body of Christ, the temple of God, the bride of Christ, the household of God, the vineyard of the Lord, etc. Each of these expressions portrays different spiritual relationships and responsibilities.

When Scripture speaks of the kingdom of God, it describes a monarchical form of spiritual government. The Christian religion is not a democracy where the will of the majority holds sway; rather, Christ is our King (Luke 1:31-33), and His Word is our final source of authority (Col. 3:17). Furthermore, we must be loyal and obedient citizens (Eph. 2:19-20).

Furthermore, "the kingdom of God" and "the church of Christ" refer to the same spiritual realm. Some argue that the "kingdom" and the "church" are distinct from one another. Premillennial teachers say that Jesus came to establish His kingdom, but was rejected by the Jews. They say

the church was set up as an afterthought or substitute measure, and the kingdom will be established later. However, a careful examination of Scripture reveals that this is a false distinction (Matt. 16:16-19; Col. 1:13-14, 18; Heb. 12:22-24, 28-29; Rev. 1:4, 6, 9).

## **The Dividing Line**

In the New Testament the kingdom of God is represented as both a rule unto which man must submit (Luke 17:20-21; Rom. 14:16-17) and a realm into which man must enter (Luke 16:16; Matt. 4:23-25). In either case, we may be near unto or far from God's kingdom, depending upon our attitude and disposition.

God's purpose in establishing the kingdom/church was to bring men and women into full submission unto Christ. He removes us from the sinful realm of darkness and translates us into the kingdom of His dear Son (Col. 1:13-14). The New Testament reveals the conditions for citizenship in this spiritual kingdom. We are saved through an obedient faith (Matt. 7:21-23). The Lord adds people to His church as they are saved (Acts 2:46-47). It all boils down to one simple question: "Are you willing to do what God has said?" This is the dividing line.

## **The Qualities Of Nearness**

Many are far from the kingdom of God: Romans Chapter Three describes the state of fallen humanity. Mankind is lost and undone. Their hearts are corrupt and defiled. Ignorant of God's word and lacking spirituality, they are self-righteous, self-seeking, self-destructive, self-condemned (Rom. 3:10-18).

Others, like this scribe, have progressed spiritually to the point that they are near unto the kingdom of God. The difference is one of attitude. When Jesus saw that the scribe **answered wisely**, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God" (Mark 12:34). The Greek word translated "wisely/intelligently" is defined as "sensibly, discreetly" and is descriptive of action that is "wisely, thoughtfully" pursued [Thomas, BDAG].

### ***Knowledgeable***

In the context, Jesus had been discussing the true nature of devotion. He was asked, "Which is the first commandment of all?" Our Lord answered that the first commandment is to love God supremely and the second is to love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:28-31). This scribe expressed full support for Jesus' statement. He understood man has a tendency to substitute ceremony for substance. Without belittling the importance of divinely-ordained sacrifices, this man clearly understood that love for God and one's fellowman is at the heart of genuine religion (Mark 12:32-33). Obviously, he possessed a knowledge of God's Word and was sufficiently perceptive to make proper application.

Knowledge is essential. Hosea condemned the Israelites, saying that they faced certain destruction because of their lack of knowledge (Hos. 4:6). Jesus affirmed that men are drawn to God as they hear, learn and are taught (John 6:44-45).

So far, so good. This scribe was on the right path, but he had not yet reached the kingdom of God. He still had further to travel. Knowledge, by itself, will not save a man. It will, however, make one a fit candidate for conversion.

### ***Open-Minded***

The scribes, Sadducees, and Pharisees generally opposed Jesus. However, this man was not governed by the herd instinct. The Jewish leaders constantly disputed with Jesus, listened only with a view to entrapping Him in His words, and summarily dismissed His teaching. Yet, this man listened with an open and receptive mind.

Let us learn from his example: Open-mindedness is essential. A wise son will incline his ear to wisdom and apply his heart to understanding (Prov. 2:1-5). Let us be like the noble Bereans who searched the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so (Acts 17:11).

So far, so good. This scribe was on the right path, but he had not yet reached the kingdom of God. He still had further to travel. Open-mindedness, by itself, will not save a man. It will, however, make one a fit candidate for conversion.

### ***Courageous***

This scribe was courageous in speech. He was willing to acknowledge that Jesus spoke the truth. As a rule, the scribes and Pharisees did not believe on Jesus. Those that did believe were often afraid to confess Him (John 12:42). Yet, here was a man bold enough to acknowledge truth when he heard it. He courageously affirmed his agreement with the teachings of Jesus.

Courage is essential. Like David of old, we should be willing to openly speak of God's testimonies without shame or fear (Psalms 119:46). It is imperative that we have the courage to openly confess Christ before men (Matthew 10:32-33).

So far, so good. This scribe was on the right path, but he had not yet reached the kingdom of God. He still had further to travel. Courage, by itself, will not save a man. It will, however, make one a fit candidate for conversion.

### ***Humble***

Pride and arrogance were characteristic of the scribes and the Pharisees (Luke 18:11-14). Truth is hidden from those who are proud and preening (Luke 10:21). However, this scribe was different. He was humble in spirit.

Humility is essential. Jesus praised this disposition when he said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matt. 5:3). We must walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8).

So far, so good. This scribe was on the right path, but he had not yet reached the kingdom of God. He still had further to travel. You see, humility, by itself, will not save a man. It will, however, make one a fit candidate for conversion.

## **The Terms Of Admission**

This scribe demonstrated the right attitude toward God, God's law and his fellow man. Yet, attitude is not enough; it must be accompanied by action. Jesus' statement, "Thou are not far from the kingdom of God," must have been an invitation for him to come the whole distance. What good is it for one to remain at the border of God's kingdom? So near and yet so far. So near, and yet he was still lost.

To enter the kingdom of God, one must be born of water and the Spirit (John 3:1-5). This involves faith in Christ (John 8:24), repentance from past sins (Luke 13:3), confession that Jesus is the son of God (Matt. 10:32-33) and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:26-27). If you have not been baptized, you have not put on Christ, you are not yet a part of His body, or a citizen in His kingdom, or a member of His church. You may be near the kingdom, but you are not yet in it.

## **Conclusion**

Many today are in the same condition as this scribe. How near have they come to the kingdom? In many cases they have been brought near by the actions of others. They have been positively influenced by some faithful Christian. They are acquainted with the truths of religion. They have studied the Scriptures and have a basic understanding of the gospel of Christ. They respect the Bible as the Word of God. They admire the person of Christ, His moral purity, His teaching, and His compassion. They may even attend periods of Christian worship. They obey many laws of Christ, either from habit or conviction. Many times they have desired to go further. They may have even resolved to yield all to the Savior. And yet, they still have not rendered obedience.

How far are they from the kingdom? Men may travel a long distance in the right direction, and yet not complete the journey. They refuse to take the last few steps. They have yet to receive the gospel of Christ with their whole nature. The assent of the understanding must be followed by the consent of the will. They have not yet surrendered themselves to Jesus. Men may give much, but withhold more. Jesus demands our all, and He will not accept less.

Why remain on the outside looking in? Why remain on the borderland of God's kingdom? Christ stands at the door and desires entrance into your life (Rev. 3:20). Do not keep him waiting in the cold. Do not stop short of full obedience. Come the whole distance. Act on your faith. Turn from your sins. Confess Christ before men. Be buried with Christ in baptism. Then be raised to walk in newness of life. Spend yourself in His service, and heaven will be your home.

Whether or not this scribe was ever born into the kingdom of God is not stated. Perhaps this man was eventually numbered among the "great company of priests" and other Jewish leaders who were obedient to the faith after the day of Pentecost (Acts 6:7). One hopes so. And yet, for all his nearness to the kingdom of God, it may be that he never entered it. How tragic it is that many who are not far from the kingdom of God never actually enter therein. As someone once said, "On the plains of hesitation bleach the bones of countless thousands who on the threshold of victory sat down to wait; while waiting, wasted and died." Therefore, if you believe, do not hesitate. Obey today!

**Sources:** Walton Weaver, “Not Far From The Kingdom,” *Gospel Communicator*, (Longview, TX: Judson Rd COC), July, 1988. Misc Commentaries. Extensively revised.